

City of Palo Alto Business Registry

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Business Registry Certificate (BRC)?

Every business in the City of Palo Alto is required to obtain a Business Registry Certificate (BRC) annually. **A flat fee of \$54* and basic information about your business is required annually.** An online (or paper) application form is submitted along with payment of the annual fee. This provides the City of Palo Alto with basic data regarding businesses located within Palo Alto. Most of the questions are basic to your business, so it should take just a few minutes to complete. Once you submit the application form and pay the annual fee, your Business Registry Certificate (BRC) will be mailed via USPS within 7-10 business days.

NEW in 2018: The City of Palo Alto has partnered with MuniServices, LLC (aka Avenu Insights & Analytics) for the administration of the Business Registry program and for assistance with billing and payment collection. For questions or information about your account, contact MuniServices toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

** This fee includes a \$4 state mandated fee on any application for local business license or similar instrument or permit or renewal thereof. The purpose is to increase disability access and compliance with construction-related accessibility requirements and to develop educational resources for businesses in order to facilitate compliance with federal and state disability laws, as specified.*

Why does the City of Palo Alto need this data?

The data will help the City measure employment trends, business growth, and economic activity in a more comprehensive way. It is critical to have this data to develop and measure the effectiveness of programs to reduce traffic congestion, better utilize parking, and coordinate with other transportation-related efforts. The data will also help us to make better informed decisions on a host of critical issues including:

- ✓ Land use
- ✓ Economic development
- ✓ Public safety/emergency response/disaster preparedness
- ✓ Regional Water Quality Control Plant compliance
- ✓ Business outreach and support

Where did the idea originate?

In November 2014, the Palo Alto City Council passed [Ordinance #5379](#) which required every business in Palo Alto operating from a “Fixed Place of Business” (e.g., a place meant for business purposes such as an office or retail space) to register and pay a fee each year. If you have a **physical** business address in Palo Alto, you are most likely required to register and obtain a BRC. The ordinance is available for review at www.cityofpaloalto.org/businessregistry (scroll to bottom).

Do I have to complete/submit an application form every year?

Yes, any business operating, or planning to operate, in a “Fixed Place of Business” (e.g., a place meant for businesses purposes such as an office or retail space) must register and complete the online (or paper) application form every year. This is to ensure the City has up-to-date information.

What questions will be asked of me?

To successfully complete the application form, please have the following information available:

- Business name, description, structure, inception date
- Business owner/principal name, telephone number, email address
- Business address (primary plus all other locations in Palo Alto)
- Square footage* your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location
- Federal EIN and/or Seller's Permit # (if none, enter "NA")
- State of incorporation

** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

*** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

Is this a one-time registration?

No, any business subject to the Business Registry is required to update their information and pay a fee on an **annual** basis by **March 31**. This is to ensure the City has up-to-date information.

What happens if I don't register my business?

Businesses who do not register by the deadline of **March 31** each year can be subject to fees, penalties, and collection activities.

My Business Registry Certificate is about to expire....

Although we will attempt to notify your business using the contact information you provided in last year's application form (e.g., owner's email address), it is **your** responsibility to renew your Business Registry Certificate in advance of the expiration date – **March 31**. Simply visit the [MuniServices](https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com) web site at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com> to file an application form and submit payment.

If you are an existing business, you will need the unique USERNAME and PASSWORD assigned to your business. For questions about online filing, or if you do not have the USERNAME and/or PASSWORD for your business, contact MuniServices toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

What fees do I have to pay?

Each fixed-based business in Palo Alto shall pay a flat rate of **\$54** each year*.

** This fee includes a \$4 state mandated fee on any application for local business license or similar instrument or permit or renewal thereof. The purpose is to increase disability access and compliance with construction-related accessibility requirements and to develop educational resources for businesses in order to facilitate compliance with federal and state disability laws, as specified.*

What is the fee used for?

The fee is used for administering the program and maintaining the online portal at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com>. This is a *cost-recovery* program, not a revenue-generating program, for the City.

Is the fee tax deductible?

Please consult with your individual tax advisor.

How can I file the application form and pay the annual fee?

To file/pay online:

- Existing businesses were mailed unique USERNAMES and TEMPORARY PASSWORDS from MuniServices along with instructions.
- Visit <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com>
- Payment options: ACH Debit (checking/savings) or Credit Card (Visa, Mastercard, Discover)
- For questions about online filing, or if you do not have the USERNAME and/or TEMPORARY PASSWORD for your business, contact MuniServices toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

To file/pay via postal mail:

- A downloadable application form is available at <http://www.avenuinsights.com> (Taxpayer Login → For Taxpayers → Select Your State: California → Taxpayer Forms → Palo Alto → PALO ALTO BUSINESS REGISTRY APPLICATION).
- Be sure to reference your MuniServices account # on the application form and complete each section. If you don't know your MuniServices account #, contact MuniServices toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.
- Make check payable to “**Tax Trust Account**” and remit along with your form to:
MuniServices, LLC
City of Palo Alto Business Registry
555 Bryant Street #821
Palo Alto, CA 94301

How will I receive the Business Registry Certificate?

Once your application form and payment have cleared, a certificate will be issued and sent via postal mail. This can take up to 7-10 business days. If requested, a certificate can be sent via email or fax.

What are the reasons a Business Registry Certificate is on hold and not released?

A certificate will remain on hold and not released if:

- The payment has not yet cleared/settled, including online payments.
- The business registry fee, CASp fee, or penalties were underpaid.
- The application was missing *required* fields and we have been unable to obtain the missing information from the applicant.
- The applicant did not sign the required sworn statements.

Where can I find more information about the Business Registry program?

The City has developed a website at https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/business/business_registry

to help with basic details and provide contact information. We have also developed this FAQ document. If you need further assistance, contact MuniServices, LLC (aka Avenu Insights & Analytics) toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

If I'm completing the online form and run into an issue, how do I get help?

To get help, contact MuniServices, LLC toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

Who is exempt from the Business Registry?

For exemptions approved by the City Council, you may review Palo Alto Municipal Code [Chapter 4.60](#) and [Ordinance #5379](#).

In January 2016, the City Council amended the ordinance to exempt:

- Very small businesses and non-profit organizations with less than 1 Full-Time-Equivalent employee (i.e., 2080 hours or less of annual on-site working time for all employees), including owners/principals, executives, full-time, part-time, contractors, and/or volunteers
- Religious organizations with **no** ancillary business on-site.

Other exemptions which have been in effect since 2015 are:

- [Home-based businesses](#)
- Transitory (or Virtual) businesses

NOTE: **Transitory** businesses include contractors/sub-contractors performing work from time to time in the City and do not have fixed places of business in Palo Alto. These businesses are exempt from the Business Registry and are not required to claim an exemption or file an application form.

How do I claim an exemption?

To claim your exemption: Visit the [MuniServices](#) web site at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com> to file an application form and declare your exemption status. If you are an existing business, you will need the unique USERNAME and PASSWORD assigned to your business. For questions about online filing, or if you do not have the USERNAME and/or PASSWORD for your business, contact MuniServices toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com. New businesses or unregistered businesses can click "Sign Up" to register as a new user.

Select your exemption status by answering all questions shown below and provide some basic information about your business, such as business name, address, etc. By answering "Yes" to one question (and "No" to all other questions), your exemption is claimed and no payment is due.

- Are you a very small business or non-profit with less than 1 Full-Time-Equivalent employee on-site (including owner/principal)? Y/N

- Are you a home-based or transitory (virtual) business? Y/N
- Are you a religious organization with no ancillary business on-site? Y/N
- Has your business relocated outside the City of Palo Alto in the past year? Y/ N
- Is your business permanently closed? Y/N

Do I have to claim an exemption every year?

Yes. This is to ensure the City has up-to-date information. For example, you may move to another location in Palo Alto, move outside Palo Alto, or close your business.

I am a general or sub-contractor based in another city (i.e., my office is not located in Palo Alto) but working (or planning to work) on a project in Palo Alto. Do I need to register?

At this time, the City does not issue business licenses; however, this is subject to change. In addition, you are **not** required to register with the City of Palo Alto through the Business Registry program. However, make sure your project is permitted through our Development Services team and your state or other licenses/permits are up-to-date. The Development Services team is located at 285 Hamilton Avenue – 1st Floor and available Monday-Friday, 8:00 am to 4:00 pm. They can be reached at (650) 329-2496 or Building@cityofpaloalto.org. For more information, go to <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/depts/ds>.

I operate a business out of my home. Do I need to register?

At this time, home-based businesses are required to register/claim an exemption but not required to pay the annual fee. To claim an exemption on the [MuniServices](https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com) web site at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com> – see “How do I claim an exemption?”

NOTE: You should also be familiar with the City’s municipal code section that addresses home-based businesses. [\[PAMC Section 18.42.060\]](#)

Does a non-profit corporation need to register?

If your non-profit organization has 1 or more Full-Time-Equivalent employees (including owner/principals, executives, full-time, part-time, contractors, and/or volunteers) regularly located in an office or commercial building in Palo Alto, you are required to register and pay the annual fee.

If your organization has less than 1 FTE, you are required to register/claim an exemption but not required to pay the annual fee. To claim an exemption on the [MuniServices](https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com) web site at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com> – see “How do I claim an exemption?”

Does a religious organization need to register?

If your religious organization does not have an ancillary business on-site (e.g., book store, gift shop, child care center, after school program, day care services, etc.), you are required to register/claim an exemption but not required to pay the annual fee. To claim an exemption on the [MuniServices](https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com) web site at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com> – see “How do I claim an exemption?”

NOTE: Child care businesses leasing/renting space on property owned by a religious organization (e.g., church) are required to register as an individual business and pay an annual fee.

I have a P.O. Box, or use a virtual office address, in Palo Alto to receive business mail. Do I need to register?

If you do not have a physical address in Palo Alto, and use a PO Box or a virtual office address to receive business mail, you are required to register/claim an exemption but not required to pay the annual fee. To claim an exemption on the [MuniServices](https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com) web site at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com> – see “How do I claim an exemption?”

Due to the nature of my business, my company receives postal mail for a number of companies. Does each of them need to register at my address?

If they do not have employees working on-site at your physical location, they are required to register/claim an exemption but not required to pay the annual fee. They are considered Transitory (or Virtual) businesses who are exempt from the Business Registry at this time.

IMPORTANT: Each company is required to register/claim an exemption on the [MuniServices](https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com) web site at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com> as explained above – see “How do I claim an exemption?” Please inform each company using your site to receive mail or tell them to contact MuniServices toll free at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

I have multiple locations in Palo Alto. Do I need to register multiple times?

No. When completing the application form, answer “**Yes**” to the question “*Does your business have additional locations in the City of Palo Alto?*” You will be prompted to enter the address and furnish the following information for each location:

- Square footage* your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location

** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

*** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

My business is a large company with a campus of buildings. Do I need to list each building individually?

If your campus can be identified at one address, you can list the main address and provide all of the information for your company using the main address. If you have buildings in multiple sites, reply “**Yes**” to the question “*Does your business have additional locations in the City of Palo Alto?*” You will be prompted to enter the address and furnish the following information for each location:

- Square footage* your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location

** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

*** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

I have several business entities (fictitious business names, other business structures, etc.) listed for my business activity. Do I need to register each of them individually?

If you have multiple businesses essentially incorporating the same people at the same location, you only need to complete/submit one application form and pay one annual fee. When completing the form, reply “**Yes**” to the question “*Do you have any other registered businesses or entities on site?*” You will be prompted to list the legal names of all business entities related to your business in the section titled “**Additional Business Entities.**”

I’m in a building with many different businesses. Do we each need to register?

Most likely, yes. Unless the different businesses are employing the same people, each business is required to obtain a Business Registry Certificate, i.e., register individually by completing the application form and paying the annual fee by March 31 every year.

My business is a property management company that services multiple addresses throughout Palo Alto—do I need to obtain a Business Registry Certificate?

If your office (where your employees are based) is located in Palo Alto, you would likely need to register your business and obtain a Business Registry Certificate. If your Main Office is located outside Palo Alto, but you have employees dedicated on-site at a location (or locations) in Palo Alto, designate the most appropriate address as the Primary Address.

If you have at least one Full-Time-Equivalent employee dedicated on-site (i.e., staff for an office, lobby, or front desk) at **other** locations in Palo Alto, you should also list them in the space provided for Secondary Locations. When filling out the application form, reply “**Yes**” to the question “*Does your business have additional locations in the City of Palo Alto?*” You will be prompted to enter each location and furnish the following information for each location:

- Square footage* your business occupies in each location
- Number of employees on-site** at each location
- Number of on-site parking spaces dedicated to your business at each location
- Number of annual parking permits purchased for employees at each location

** The gross area in square feet your business occupies. You can find this information in your lease agreement or building floor plans. For assistance, contact your property management team.*

*** Total number of employees (full-time, part-time, contract, or volunteer – including Owner/Principal) at each location during peak times on a normal business day.*

NOTE: If generally you do not have employees on-site at other locations in Palo Alto (i.e., only for repairs or maintenance), you do not need to list any additional locations.

I have other locations outside Palo Alto, but I do business in Palo Alto too. How do I register the other locations?

At this time, the City of Palo Alto Business Registry pertains only to businesses located in a fixed place of business in Palo Alto. Businesses based in other cities, but operating here (such as contractors or sub-contractors, consultants, real estate agents, etc.) are not required to register in Palo Alto. You should check the requirements of the cities where you're located and/or doing business to see if there is a business registry or license requirement.

I want to close or sell my business...what should I do?

Business Registry accounts are **NOT** automatically cancelled; therefore, we need to hear from you. You may send an email to MuniServices at bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com and provide the following information:

- Business Name
- Business Address - Street Number/Name in Palo Alto
- Owner Name
- Owner Email Address
- Owner Telephone Number
- Closure/Move Date
- New Owner contact information (if business was sold)

NOTE: Business Registry Certificates are non-transferable. A NEW application must be completed by the new owner before a Business Registry Certificate can be issued. Your assistance in communicating this requirement to the new owner is helpful.

Do I have to register and obtain a Business Registry Certificate (BRC) even if I just purchased an existing business, i.e., became the new owner?

Yes, a Business Registry Certificate is non-transferable. Upon change of ownership, you are required to register and pay the annual fee to obtain a Business Registry Certificate.

I want to move my business to a new location within the City of Palo Alto or add another site/location. Will I need to register again and obtain a second BRC?

You are not required to obtain a second BRC. If your business is currently registered with the City of Palo Alto, **HAS NOT** had a change in ownership, and is moving to a new location or adding another site/location in Palo Alto, specific information is needed concerning each new location. You may provide the information listed below using a Business Registry application form located [here](#). (Check "*Information Update Only*" at the top of the application form and provide your MuniServices Account # along with the updated applicable fields.)

- Business Name:
- Street number/name:
- Floor business is located:
- Suite number:
- Square footage:
- Number of employees at this location (including owner):
- Number of annual parking permits purchased from the City for your employees at this site:
- Number of parking spaces on-site dedicated to your business:
- Main business telephone number (if different):

- Date of Move:

Once completed, the updated application may be emailed to MuniServices, LLC at bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

I submitted my application form and payment, but now some information has changed. What do I do?

If your business is currently registered with the City of Palo Alto, **HAS NOT** had a change in ownership, and you only need to update one or more of the following items, you may do so by completing an updated Business Registry Application located [here](#). (Check “Information Update Only” at the top of the application and provide your MuniServices Account # along with the updated applicable fields.)

- Mailing/location address
- Contact information
- Exemption status
- Specific location details (# of employees, parking permit info, etc.)
- Business hours
- Transportation/commuter information

Once completed, the updated application may be emailed to MuniServices, LLC at bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

Our business has moved (or we plan to move) to a new location in Palo Alto. How do I update our address?

If your business is currently registered with the City of Palo Alto, **HAS NOT** had a change in ownership, and moving (or planning to move) to a new location in Palo Alto, specific information is needed concerning the new location. You may provide the location’s information using a Business Registry Application located [here](#). (Check “Information Update Only” at the top of the application and provide your MuniServices account # along with the updated applicable fields.)

- Business Name
- Street Number/Name
- Floor business is located
- Suite number
- Square footage
- Number of employees at this location (including owner)
- Number of annual parking permits purchased from the City for your employees at this location
- Number of parking spaces on site dedicated to your business
- Main Business Telephone Number (if different)
- Date of Move

Once completed, the updated application may be emailed to MuniServices, LLC at bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

My business closed, was sold, or relocated outside the City of Palo Alto. What do I do?

Business Registry accounts are **NOT** automatically cancelled; therefore, we need to hear from you. You may send an email to MuniServices at bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com and provide the following information:

- Business Name
- Business Address (Street Number/Name)
- Owner Name
- Owner Email Address
- Owner Telephone Number
- Closure/Move Date
- New Owner contact information (if business was sold) – see Note below.

NOTE: Business Registry Certificates are non-transferable. A NEW application must be completed by the new owner before a Business Registry Certificate can be issued. Your assistance in communicating this requirement to the new owner is helpful.

How will the City use my contact information?

The City will use your email address to reach you with information related to the annual renewal. We may also contact you with information related to City business, collection activities, or emergencies.

Is my business information confidential?

Most of the information collected by the City on the [MuniServices](#) web site is considered a public record. As a matter of course, the City releases certain information to the public, especially as relates to **aggregated data** regarding the business districts and basic business listings. Certain information is considered confidential and not released by the City. This includes: Federal Employment Identification Number (EIN), Seller's Permit Number, Credit Card Number, and other payment information. The City will take steps to protect the privacy of certain information which could be deemed sensitive or proprietary. In some cases, the City will release this type of data in a range.

I want to renew my Business Registry Certificate, but I forgot (or don't know) my account information – Account Number, Username, or Password associated with my online filing account. What do I do?

Contact MuniServices, LLC at (866) 240-3665 or bizlicensesupport@muniservices.com.

I forgot my password. How do I reset it?

To reset your password, click **Forgot Password?** on the Home page. On the next page, enter the Email Address and Username associated with your online filing account at <https://PaloAlto.BizLicenseOnline.com>.

Can I stop in the middle of entering information and return to the form at a later time?

At any time, you can save your answers, sign out, and resume the form at a later time. When you wish to resume, sign in with the **same** username and **same** password.